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ABSTRACT

This second paper in the intrapersonal skills series is concerned with belief systems and how individuals can manage self-esteem by internalizing assertion and awareness training program concepts. The introduction of the paper defines self-esteem and examines how individuals form their self-concepts. It is proposed that persons gather and selectively encode information from external events in accordance with some already existing internal scripts. Assertion training is described as a way to increase self-esteem and respect by enabling people to choose to respond by defining a set of rights which people must learn to act upon. Two sets of rights which might be internalized are presented. The first set concerns the basic rights of the individual in the work situation and 10 work-related rights are listed and explained. Meetings at work are presented as activities which can create stress and conflict, and 12 rights related to meetings are listed. The second set of rights concerns general basic rights of the individual, and 11 such rights are listed and discussed. (NRB)

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MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT:
PERSONAL GROWTH THROUGH
INTRA-PERSONAL SKILLS

2. Belief Systems: The Effective Management of Self-esteem by Internalising Programmes from Assertion and Awareness Training

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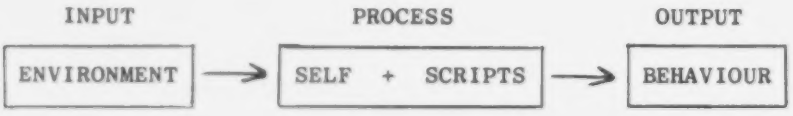
THE EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF SELF-ESTEEM USING INTERNAL PROGRAMMES FROM ASSERTION AND AWARENESS TRAINING

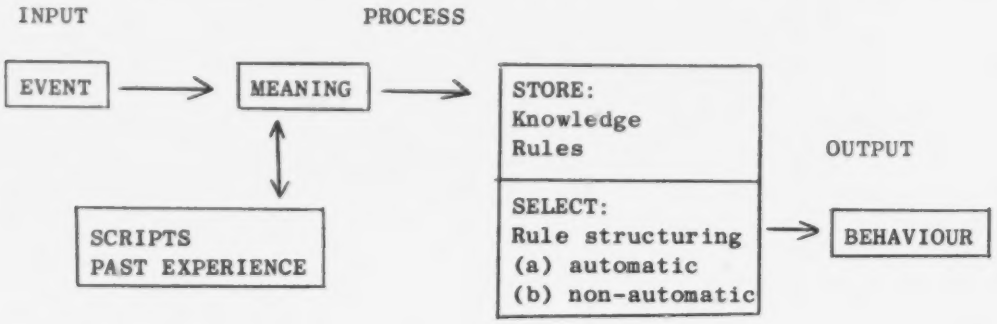
Introduction

1. Self-esteem, or the value we place on ourselves, is the product of our unique life experiences and interactions with other people. It is defined in the way we think other people see us, so that we tend to adopt others' perspectives about ourself in order to give ourselves a sense of who we are and what we are like. We thus accumulate sets of "internal programmes" which direct our behaviour and provide points of reference for judging the goodness or badness of those behaviours. The knowledge we gather is indirect, since it is derived from a biased sample of information available about us from perceiving the environment. We systematically gather and selectively encode information from external events in accordance with some already laid down internal programme (scripts).



2. Many of these scripts have been given by external authority figures; parents in childhood, by selected models of ideal behaviour as we grow older, by organisations. Self-esteem is also related to the various roles we play in life, producing a set of multiple selves from which we choose strategies of self-presentation as we think appropriate. We thus foster personal control and self integration.

3. However, every event is interpreted, or given a meaning, and stored in the memory in the form of knowledge which produces a set or rules for generating behaviour in new situations as we meet them. Some behaviours are controlled by automatic scripting in that we do not have to think about the rule, while others, non-controlled acts, require some contemplation of rules for selecting appropriate or "correct" behaviour.



4. We thus organise our behaviour by internalising sets of rules which others give us (and which may no longer be applicable), or those which we devise for ourselves in response to perceived environments (from which the information may or may not be accurate). At the same time we will be setting up intra-personal conflict according to the difficulty we find in re-organising sets of rules we feel no longer useful, or, as we attempt to restructure them to meet the standards set by some ideal model of how we would like to be and behave.

5. Faulty inner dialogue about our self-esteem creates self-doubts leading to bad feelings and to ineffective action (in turn creating further self-doubts and further ineffective action). Such dialogue also occurs against a background of conflicting attitudes, values, needs, wants, wishes and sets of "ought's" and "should's". Together they can combine to create a low self-esteem. The more inner conflict, the less easy it is to choose effective behaviours from a wide repertoire, to select appropriately, and to act effectively.

6. Low self-esteem creates choices of action based on the expectations of others rather than on our own sets of rules. Deceptions and masks in social interaction, and intrapersonal conflicts between the reality of our self-image and the ideal self-image, can lessen the value of our interactions with people at work and in life generally, as well as inhibit the full development of potential for growth. Greater authenticity can be achieved by internalising some new, more effective cognitive constructs about how to behave, removing inappropriate "ought's" and "should's" and replacing them with a more rational self of beliefs about our own autonomy.

7. People are treated the way they teach other people to treat them, so developing authenticity and resolving intra-personal conflict is really about teaching others how you want to be treated. Handing control of your behaviour to others leads to lower self-esteem and to response behaviour which is less effective - aggession, submissiveness, passivity or manipulation.

8. The extent to which we behave assertively is a reflection of the degree to which we have internalised effective cognitive constructs which direct our behaviour. The conceptual foundation for assertive behaviour provides such a set of constructs.

9. Assertion training has been developed to increase self-esteem and respect in enabling people to choose to respond by laying down a set of "rights" which people have to learn to act upon. What you believe affects your behaviour.

10. Non-assertive behaviour, on the other hand, is based on the belief that your own needs and wants are less important than those of others, so that you end up discounting other people, justifying your own

needs or accommodating other people's needs. Assertion is about taking responsibility for yourself, your opinions, and wants, so that you can control your feelings and produce the behaviour you want. It reduces personal stress, inner conflict, self doubt and manipulation by others.

11. The set of rights which belong to you are likely, when internalised and form the basis for choice, to enable you effectively to manage your self-esteem by helping to modify "Not OK feelings", discounts, defence mechanisms, and games played. The concepts of assertive behaviour form a suitable cognitive construct to direct the management of the self in transactions with others. Managing self-doubt is more effective if the rules which actually create those self-doubts are replaced by more authentic belief systems.

The Basic Rights of the Individual : Work

12. The first set of rights which might be internalised are those dealing with the work situation. There are ten fundamental rights you possess and which you must exercise as appropriately as you think.

i. You have the right to be clear what is expected of you

The role you play in a job, whatever the job description states, is essentially a compilation of sets of expectations other people have of the job. The most frequent cause of distress is that these expectations are unreal, ambiguous, arbitrary and unexpressed.

ii. You have the right to know how your performance is perceived by superiors

Since your work may be affected by their views of your performance, you have the right to ensure that their views are as accurate as possible. You also have the right to feedback, since without feedback you cannot continue to perform well or change your performance to meet their legitimate requirements.

iii. You have the right to carry out your job in your own way once objectives and constraints have been agreed

Education is considered a profession and you have the right to exercise your professional judgement.

iv. You have the right to make mistakes

No one is perfect: a "be perfect 100% of the time" is an impossible contract. However, mistakes when made have to be accepted and for which responsibility has to be taken.

v. You have the right as a manager to participate in selecting people who work for you

vi. You have the right to expect work of a certain standard from your staff

The criteria which are used must be explicit and agreed. If they are not, you are infringing the rights of others.

vii. You have the right to criticise staff if performance falls below that standard.

Criticisms must be constructive and, bearing in mind your responsibility as a possible cause of falling below standard, treated as a learning situation.

viii. You have the right to be consulted about decisions which affect you

ix. You have the right to take decisions about matters that affect your areas of managerial responsibilities

x. You have the right to refuse unreasonable requests

13. Some of these rights may be clearly understood, agreed and accepted between you and the people with whom you work and would be largely rights stemming from your job description. There may be some conflict, however, between these rights of the job and rights derived from a central policy, your contract of employment, and your job description. Where this occurs, the last three rights take priority over the others.

14. Asserting these job rights is not subversive. Contained within them is the concept that obviously those are the rights of other people too. Any organisation which works in such a way that peoples' rights are not violated is likely to be more effective, have less dysfunctional conflict, and less individual and organisational stress.

15. Rights such as these extend across all aspects of the job. One function which creates conflict and stress is, for example, the meeting. An effective and efficient meeting is one in which the following rights are recognised and exercised, since everyone attending a meeting has the right to :

i. Know in advance generally how long the meeting will last

ii. Know in advance what the aim of the meeting is

iii. State opinions and make suggestions

iv. Have opinions and suggestions listened and responded to

v. Understand what is being said

vi. Attend only those meetings, or parts of meetings, which are relevant

vii. Spend their time productively at meetings

viii. Express their feelings

ix. Disagree with views and suggestions put forward by others

x. Make a contribution without being interrupted

xi. Have Minutes (where appropriate) that are an accurate reflection of what was said at the meeting

xii. Exercise these and other basic human rights.

The Basic Rights of the Individual : General

16. The extent to which we behave assertively in our dealings with others is a reflection upon the degree to which we have internalised effective cognitive constructs which direct our behaviour. Ineffective constructs may hand over directions to all those who would gladly accept control.

17. Passive, aggressive and submissive behaviour patterns stem from self-doubts. Self-doubts lead in turn to assessing (probably inaccurately) failings and weaknesses which create ineffective behaviour. That ineffective behaviour returns, like a spiral, to further self-doubts, and so on.

18. Managing self-doubts is more effective if the rules which actually create those self doubts are replaced by more authentic systems.

19. The following are basic individual rights which may provide such authentic belief systems :

i. 'I have the right to state my own needs and set my own priorities as a person independent of any roles that I may assume or be ascribed in life'

A role comprises a set of expectations, by yourself and others, about what you should do in that role. Sometimes we allow life roles to take precedence over our personalities in trying to fulfil responsibilities, commitments, ties and demands of others, so that obligations and responsibilities of the role can obstruct what we genuinely want to do. To state your own needs does not mean you absolve responsibilities allied to certain roles, but simply that your own needs exist as well as those for whom you care or to whom you are committed. The major difficulty is asserting needs when there is role conflict.

ii. 'I have the right to be treated with respect as an intelligent, capable and equal human being, to be listened to and taken seriously'

To be treated with respect is the most basic of all personal

rights. The difficulty is that we often do not treat ourselves with respect, or give ourselves equal credit for intelligence or ability. People can manipulate you to distrust your own intelligence, knowledge and common sense.

iii. 'I have the right to express my feelings'

To believe that we have a right to express our feelings is a new experience for many of us, particularly in our culture: we may have learned from early childhood to be agreeable. The implicit message in this training teaches us to deny our feelings. If we do this often enough we may begin to forget what our feelings are. When we do express our feelings we must take responsibility for them. Losing touch with feelings and emotions diminishes the validity of emotional expression. It is easier to put feelings aside than to express them, so that often we agonise over an event, or an interaction for months before we finally register what it was we felt. Recognise and identify feelings and accept them, expressing them appropriately.

iv. 'I have the right to express my opinions and values'

This includes the right to stand up for your opinions if you so choose, even if your opinions stand in disagreement with those of the majority. It is not a question of right or wrong, but of differences in perception. It is easy to deny values and rationalise feelings, and simply to keep the peace. However, resentment may lead to aggressive confrontation and a 'no-win' situation where little or nothing is resolved. You have the right to judge your own behaviour, thoughts and actions and to take the responsibility for their initiation and consequences upon yourself. You are not ruled totally by external rules and procedures; if you are, you are being manipulated. Happiness and fulfilment comes from you alone, not from anyone else.

v. 'I have the right to say 'yes' or 'no' for myself'

This sounds relatively simple but it is very much connected with the first 'right' concerning roles and responsibilities. Making a choice for yourself because you want, or do not want, something becomes more difficult when you have other roles to fulfil. You have the right to offer no reasons or excuses for justifying your behaviour.

vi. 'I have the right to make mistakes'

Nobody is perfect. However, whilst we may tolerate mistakes in others, we may not in ourselves. We can stop ourselves from developing if we take a 'be perfect' attitude.

(a) If criticised we are often covered with shame or confusion, often out of all proportion to the seriousness of the actual error. Causal factors

may be diverse. Reactions could originate from the experience of being punished as children, or the whole educational construct of 'right and wrong', of 'good and bad' marks. Many of us believe that making a mistake is unacceptable and shows we are stupid.

(b) We tend to set store by competence and achievement, and in a competitive society it is difficult sometimes to create options other than 'I'm right' and 'you're wrong'.

(c) We can learn to shrug our shoulders and accept our mistakes. This does not indicate some intrinsic flaw of character, imply stupidity or lack of intelligence. What we can learn is that mistakes are not allowed to cause us to lose or diminish the central core of self-esteem.

vii. 'I have the right to say 'I don't understand''

As with the right to make mistakes, we feel an undue amount of shame as adults in acknowledging lack of comprehension and ignorance. We cannot be expected to know everything any more than we can expect to be perfect; but simple as the idea is, we hold back time and time again. Who told you you were stupid or silly when you said 'I don't understand'?

viii. 'I have the right to change my mind and to be illogical in making decisions' and

'I have the right to ask for what I want'

This, too, sounds straightforward until you are in conflict with other people's wishes or expectations. We often settle for things we do not want, for something that is not quite right, because we do not feel we have the right to persist, to compromise others, to make a fuss. Your 'Free Child' ego state can exert both rights without inhibition, but often your 'Adult' is in control.

ix. 'I have the right to decline responsibility for other people's problems'

The exertion of this right does not imply selfishness; it is about deciding where to draw the line. In counselling others, for example, we need to establish boundaries within ourselves and also as a part of the contract. In less intensive interaction, despite our better judgement, we are often worn down by persistent hardluck stories, misfortune, other work, personal difficulties, etc. Establishing an overt (or even covert) contract is important, so that it is acceptable to verbalise your degree of sympathy or complicity or to establish the boundaries of involvement. You have the right to be independent of the goodwill of others before coping with them since you have the right to say 'I don't care'.

This is sometimes called the 'Compassion Trap'. Guilt can be used by others as a powerful means of manipulation. You are not required to care about everything or everyone; and if you choose not to care it is no one else's business. Being "uncaring" can imply you are unfeeling and others may project their own lack of caring about an issue, or a person, onto you and make you feel or take on board their guilt, so that you are trapped into an untrue admission of caring.

x. 'I have the right to deal with others without being dependent on them for approval'

The need for approval is the single most important factor in the realms of unassertive behaviour and it is buried deep within most of us. The traditional upbringing of both male and female children is reinforced by rewarding appropriate behaviour. An early association is thus instilled between behaving in a way which is approved of and the likelihood of earning a loving response. The fear of disapproval can threaten the very roots of our self-esteem. This may hold us back from stating our needs, expressing our feelings and standing up for our rights. The more effectively you can silence (or at least reduce) your own internal critic to realistic proportions, the more successfully you can assess your own behaviour and unhook yourself from dependence on the opinion of others. This dependence and need for approval are crippling and it takes courage to lose them. After a few experiences of surviving someone's disapproval and the realisation that the world did not come to an end, it becomes easier. It also boosts morale to know you have handled a situation independently and assertively. You have the right to say 'no' without feeling guilty.

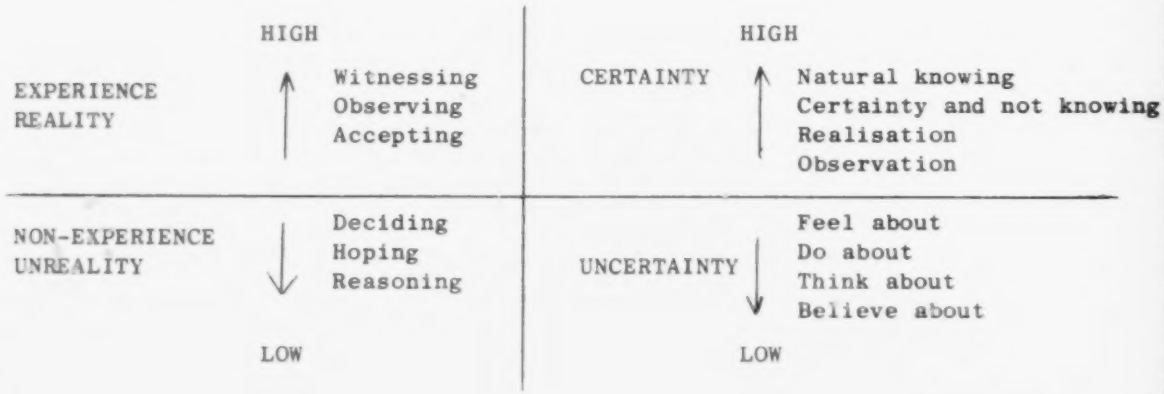
xi. 'I have the right not to assert myself'

(a) We may sometimes decide not to pursue our rights, even though we feel we are entitled to them. We can also realistically try to determine when being assertive causes more difficulties than it would solve. If a situation is dominated by others with power who are concerned with maintaining it at all costs, then an individual assertion could well be either an exercise in futility or disaster. Assessing the consequences and risks is highly important to your action.

(b) When is it appropriate to assert your own rights and when is it not? In asserting your own rights, it is always important to remember that other people have their rights.

Conclusion

20. Many of these "rights" will probably run counter to what we have been brought up to accept as an appropriate way to perceive ourselves, our roles, and our interactions with others. At the same time we will have developed scripts constructing belief and value systems concerning politics, religion, morality, ethics, etc., which may lead us to believe that we have intelligent theories about life and ourselves, sets of beliefs which give us platforms for behaviour and "understanding". They may, in fact, act as barriers to liberation and development (Erhard said, "in life understanding is the booby prize; experience is the first prize"). Thinking can often be better replaced by sensing, believing by feeling; we move to higher levels of experience and reality, as opposed to non-experience and uncertainty.



21. The more you operate in the lower levels of non-experience, reasoning and uncertainty, the more you are working within your own "added values" to reality. These added values create sets of operating "tapes" and in moments of threat, the mind - sometimes necessarily, sometimes unnecessarily - selects from its store of tapes those it finds comforting. In our very centre there exists gratuitous advice put there to give us a bad time.

22. Techniques of avoiding these barriers which we build in include the internalisation of the individual rights we possess and acting upon them, together with (dealt with in separate Papers) changing our language (since how we communicate limits our experience) and systematically removing unwanted behaviours.